LACHUTE — VITAL STATISTICS

Lachute is the chief town of the County of Argenteuil with a population in 1963 of 6,936. It is situated mainly on the south and east banks of the North River, is 49 miles from Montreal, 75 miles from Hull, 49 miles from St. Jovite, and 7 miles from St. Andrews. The altitude is around 195-220 feet; the average January and July temperatures are 9” and 68’F., and the average yearly precipitation is 30-40 inches.

CHAPTER I

EARLIEST TIMES TO 1812

Pre-History AND THE American INFLUENCE

Pre-History

About a thousand million years ago, the earth's crust began to form and the rocks comprising the Laurentian Hills, which are among the oldest in the world, were laid down.

Many millions of years later the land south of the Laurentian Hills 'began to sink and the Appalachian range of mountains at the same time began to rise above the plain so that a large lowland area was formed between the two ranges of hills that was periodically submerged from the east by the sea. The alternate periods of flooding and dry land laid down a series of rocks consisting of limestone and gravel beds, in the period that geologists name the Ordovician. Some of these rocks were hard, particularly the Beekmantown beds of a magnesian limestone which rise to the surface along a line stretching from the Lachute Falls parallel to and south of Main Street. There are quarries on Catherine Street and one east of Sydney Street, where this hard rock has been worked to provide stone for railway culverts, when the railroad from Montreal to Ottawa was built. Later the quarries provided building stone and road metal.

More millions of years passed and the whole area was buried under the vast ice flows which, as they retreated, deposited sand, gravel and a generous number of immense, rounded boulders everywhere in the fields around Lachute.

Finally, in comparatively modern times, only about one million years ago, the St. Lawrence plain was again under the sea. This last inundation, called by the geologists the Champlain Sea, was responsible for the deposition of sand which can be found all around Lachute.

As the land again rose, the sea. retreated and the rivers began to cut their way through the many deposits of sand and

rock. The later deposits were more quickly eroded than the harder Beekmantown limestone, so where the latter outcropped, the North River wore back the overlaying rocks more quickly, and so the Lachute Falls were formed.

Lachute 1797 - 1812

The Seigniory

After the French settled in Lower Canada, Louis XIV gave large tracts of land to distinguished French families. One of these seigniories, as they were called, embraced the Lachute area and was granted to Charles Joseph d'Ailleboust by the Comte de Frontenac on the 15th of June, 1682. This first seignior had a chateau at Argenteuil on the River Seine, a few miles south of Paris. He therefore called his seigniory, "The Seigniory of Argenteuil." On the south side it was bounded by the Ottawa River, whilst the western boundary was a line from the centre of Carillon as far north 'as Clear Lake. The Seigniory was 72 square miles of virgin forest, described by the Topography of Canada in 1815 as follows: "No tract will be found of greater fertility or more capable. of being converted into a valuable property — the land is rich in nearly every part." The lower reaches of the North River were not entirely in the Seigniory for there was a stretch of river between the lowest of the Falls and the Ile aux Chats where the river wandered outside the Seignoriai boundary.

In 1697, Charles Joseph and his wife, Catherine Le-Gardeur, sold the Seigniory to their son, Pierre d'Ailleboust. The heirs of his widow, by name Louise Denis, in turn. sold the fief to Louis. Panet who took the oath of fealty in 1781. Louis Panet in 1796 sold to Major Murray who finally sold it to Sir John Johnson in 1814. To the west of the Seigniory was Crown Land which was first surveyed around 1783 and divided into rectangular lots grouped into ranges. The first range, which was the most valuable, comprised the lots bordering the Ottawa River and these began to be occupied before 1788.

The Seigniors had, no doubt, surveyed their own Seigniory long before this, probably in the French regime, and maps would exist drawn up by French surveyors who first named the geographical features by French names,. la riviere du Nord, la riviere Rouge, 1'lle aux Chats, and conscientiously marked the Falls on the North River by the words, "La Chute." The Seigniors, like the British Crown, were anxious to attract settlers and in 180 1 we read of Major Murray being in Montreal trying to persuade immigrants to settle on his land. These earliest settlers came west along the Ottawa around 178 1 and a colony was established at St. Andrews in 1785; then the whole of the north shore of the Ottawa became tenanted. The Seignior possessed Seignorial rites which consisted of levying rents, claiming free labour at certain times and compelling the settlers to have their corn ground and their lumber sawn at the Seignorial mills.

The British colonization on the Front of Chatham where the settlers owned their lots, no doubt prompted the Seignior to consider selling lots to his tenants. He sold one large tract between Carillon and St. Andrews to a Peter McArthur who lived in a house on Carillon Hill that commanded wide sweeps of the Ottawa. McArthur's wife was a Miss Lane from the town of Jericho in Vermont and her brother, Jedediah Lane, also from Jericho sometimes came to stay with them at Carillon. In the early 1790's, he would notice the settlers on the Front of Chatham beginning to farm their lots and the idea probably occurred to him to purchase land and then to try and colonize it with a view to re-selling. But Lane was too late to purchase the most attractive lots on the Ottawa, and the next possibilities would be to purchase land along the other rivers, the North River and its tributary, the Rouge River, for the presence of a river was essential to the early settlers. both for communication and irrigation.

Probably with P. McArthur, Jedediah Lane studied the early survey maps of the Seigniory and noted that the North River crossed back into the Seigniory near a point on the map marked, "La Chute," before turning east towards St Jerome.

Lane finally purchased a large area of land from Major Murray on the 3rd of December, 1796, which comprised a tract of several thousand acres on each side of the river from the Falls (La Chute) eastward almost to where White's Bridge now crosses the river, (Fig. 1).

Early Settlers

Lane's next move was to entice people to settle on his land. F. C. Ireland tells us that the first resident in Lachute was from Jericho, Vermont, a man named Hezekiah Clark, who settled near the Falls in 1796 with his family of three sons and two daughters.

The indications are that Lane was the driving force in creating a settlement on his land, first purchasing the land then persuading some of his less well-endowed kinsmen of Vermont to forsake their country and begin a new life on his newly-acquired property. Therefore, the father and founder of Lachute was an American from Jericho, Vermont.

Who was this Lane ? What was he like ? Thomas tells us he was tall, of good appearance, a prosperous farmer and a college graduate. Over the period 1797 to 1814, he resold much of the land in smaller lots. Jedediah Lane, himself, taught in the small school near Lane's Corner around 1834, but unlike the other Vermont settlers, he doesn't seem to have lived permanently in Lachute until after the 1812 war. His son, Milo, was born in Jericho in 1800, and no Lanes are included in the list of Lachute families compiled by J. S. Hutchins in 1810.

In 1798, John S. Hutchins, also a native of Jericho, Vermont, came to Lachute after a short spell in Montreal, working as a compositor. He was small, partly bald, a lay preacher and a very devout Methodist. His wife was the first person to be buried in the Lachute Protestant cemetery in 1801. As there were no saw mills to make caskets, the earliest settlers' bodies were laid to rest in hollow logs. John Hutchins lived on the north side of the river on the west side of where is now Copeland's Bridge.

John Hutchins was soon joined by his brother, Phineas, who occupied a lot on the south side of the river towards Upper Lachute. John's daughter, Eliza, by his second wife, married the second son of Jedediah Lane (Milo Lane), thus uniting the two families.

In 1800, William Powers joined John S. Hutchins as they had both married sisters (the Misses Cutter). The Powers family occupied a lot about half a mile along the Bethany Road on the west side. Another early American settler was George Clines who worked for Jahn S. Hutchins, then married one of his daughters: Ireland says that, "George Clines' engagement with Hutchins was severed by an engagement with one of his daughters."

In 1798, there were only five families spread for about three miles along the river from the Falls to way above White's Bridge; but by 1800, these had increased to some 15 families, mainly from Vermont.

Americans from Vermont continued to arrive in the next few years. Among these was Benjamin Burch whose son, Alvah, built the Bee Hive Hotel on Main Street. Abner Stearns and his family of seven children settled on the north side of the River near Hill Head,, as did the brothers, Philander and Ebenezer Stephens, who were the first local brickmakers.

In 1803, there were 30 families very thinly scattered over a wide area with farms mainly on each side of the river stretching beyond Upper Lachute which is referred to in a legal document of 1800 as, "au haut de la grosse chute."

About 1800, three families of United Empire Loyalists, named Milo Barbour, Alvin Draper and Isaac Hyatt, started to farm the East Settlement about five miles from Lachute on the St. Eustache Road.

The first settler in the Beech Ridge area was Stephen Bond who purchased 500 acres in 1797. In 1807, a wooden bridge was built over the North River at St. Andrews consisting of four wooden tressles supporting five spans. No doubt this facilitated the opening up of the land north of St. Andrews'and

in 1808 we find G. A. Hooker beginning to farm along the road going north from St. Andrews called the Lachute Road.

Grenville village was first surveyed in 1811 but the first settler, Archibald McMillan, had arrived in 1810. His nearest neighbour to the west lived in Hull and eastward, Allen Cameron in Chatham was five miles away.

In 1809, the first Scottish settler, Thomas Barron, arrived from Morayshire, and his family was to dominate Lachute for many years.

We must pay homage to the pioneering spirits of the earliest settlers from Scotland. First, there was the sea voyage lasting any time from 6 to 13 weeks depending on the weather. The sea abounded in all types of hazards from French privateers ready to plunder any British vessel to English men-of-war, ever ready to intercept boats with emigrants to press-gang all able-bodied men into the navy fighting Napoleon.

The British Government arranged free passages for those who had accepted a gift of land in Canada. The journey was first to Quebec City where the Governor then arranged transport to various parts of Canada. Settlers in the Lachute area needed about 12 days to travel by flat-bottomed boats (bateaux) from Quebec City to Montreal and often another 3 or 4 days to arrive at St. Andrews which was reached only by going overland to Lachine to by-pass the Lachine rapids, then by bateaux up the Ottawa and North Rivers. In 1809 the first steamer was launched from Montreal to ply between there and Quebec. The journey even then took 66 hours with 36 stops en route. Before 1809, St. Andrews provided the last link with civilization, the last town where there were shops, stores, blacksmiths and saddlers.

The year 1809 was a turning point in the history of the area for it marked the beginning of the ascendency of the Scottish and the decline of the American influence. Between 1809 and 1812, many of the -American families left the district. There were several reasons for this, one being that the soil on their fields was rapidly becoming exhausted. A succession of hard winters and a severe famine in 1810 -11 discouraged

many of them. Whereas in 1801 the price of pork was 7 dollars a hundredweight, in 1811 it rose to 30 dollars. In 1807, the Seignior, then Major Murray, brought a suit against the settlers on Lane's purchase for dues, although Lane had purchased the land on the. understanding that it would be free of such dues: This law suit dragged on for seven years when the courts finally decided in favour of the Seignior, but an appeal reversed the decision. Those American settlers who still remained were further discouraged when Canada and the U.S.A. declared war in 1812.

However, the inflow more than compensated for the American withdrawal. Whereas in 1803 there were -only 30 families, mostly Americans, in 1810 there were 81 families and 211 children of school age. In 1812, the area mustered three companies of militia to fight in the war under three captains — Bixby,. McNeal and Phineas Hutchins, the- brother of John S. Hutchins, who captained a Volunteer Rifle Company, whilst the other companies under Bixby and McNeal belonged to the regular militia.

Early Life

Many of the American settlers appear to have been of a nomadic type making a quick dollar by felling suitable timber for conversion to potash which necessitated burning it and then leaching the soluble potash out of the ashes. This required a very modest capital, leaching tubs and iron vessels to evaporate the potash solution, the potash then being sold at St. Andrews where there was an 'ashery'. Potash was in great demand; it was used as a fertilizer and was the source of all the potassium salts required in the manufacture of soap, glass and most important of all, gunpowder. In 1810-11, England, suffering from the Napoleonic blockade, was desperate for this material and the price of potash soared to nearly 300 dollars a ton, a vast sum in those days. The American settlers for the most part did not cultivate more land than was required to supply their personal requirements of corn and potatoes. When the land was depleted of timber for potash, they moved elsewhere.

The Scottish settlers were made of sterner stuff and were prepared to farm on a permanent basis. First a log cabin had to be constructed for the shelter of the family; later there were log barns to be built for the cattle. These early houses were of the cheapest possible construction — low squat buildings of two or three rooms below and an unfinished loft above where the younger members slept, roasting in summer and freezing in winter.

The next stage was to clear the land by burning the bush and uprooting the stumps with wooden crowbars. About 1812, a primitive plough called the hog plough was in common use which merely scratched the surface of the soil. As the farm progressed and more grain, potatoes and peas were being harvested than was required to support the family, the settlers branched out into buying a horse to transport the grain to the mills, and cows and sheep were also kept. These had to be most carefully penned up as wolves and lynx were numerous and were ever on the prowl.

The sheep supplied wool which could be spun and woven into cloth. Mrs. Emslie of Lachute assisted by her mother, Mrs. Stephens, converted the wool off a lamb's back into a pair of trousers for her husband, all in the space of one day, though using cotton warp that had previously been set up in the loom.

F. C. Ireland says of the residents of the Lachute area that it would be difficult to find a new settlement with a better class of. residents. They were contented to ply the plough, the axe, the shovel during the day while the evenings were spent in reading and conversation.

Communications

In 1801, there were no roads; boundary lots would be marked out on the trees and the trails from farm to farm and to the river would be similarly blazed. The grain after threshing would be taken to the river for transference to the Seignorial mills at St. Andrews, partly by boat and partly by portaging. The next nearest mills were at St. Eustache

which were often preferred as the Seignorial dues were then avoided.

Gradually a road system linking the farms was developed. Among the earliest roads was one starting at the Seignorial boundary below the Falls and following the river on the south. side. This road was the predecessor of Main Street, Lachute. Since we know the Powers occupied a lot south of this road, a branch road would be made, the forerunner of Bethany Road and this had been extended by 1807 to link up the community of farms along Beech Ridge and from there to St. Andrews with a branch to St. Eustache and Montreal. Another road on the north side of the North River linked up the farms along the north bank to Hill Head, the predecessor of the present Dunany - Hill Head Road. The map, Fig. 1, showing the farms and roads is taken from the survey made by Bouchette, the Government Surveyor in 1814. It clearly shows that large tracts of the Seignio ry were vacant in 1814, the lots bordering on the rivers except for the farms along Beech Ridge, whereas the neighbouring Township of Chatham was extensively settled. This was partly because Crown Lands could be had for the asking, whereas land in the Seigniory had to be bought. No doubt the Seignior had to give his assent to the development of the roads which usually ended at the Seignorial boundary. The usual vehicles on these roads were the tumbrel and hay cart and even these often sank to their axles in mud, but they were invaluable to transport grain to the mill and for taking the family to the store or even to church. F. C. Ireland says that in winter, all fences had to be taken down to within 24 inches from the ground to assist the free passage of sleighs.

Industrial

When the first settlers came to Lachute, there were mills in St. Andrews and St. Eustache and the first paper mill in St. Andrews was built between 1803-05. This was on the east side of the river just south of the store of Ladouceur (1963) , the Seignorial grist mill being on the west side of the river.

The first mill in Lachute was built in 1804 on the west side of the river on the site of Wilson's paper mills. This was not popular and the people generally took their grain to St. Eustache. In 1812, a second and larger mill was built for the Seignior by George Hoyle on the east side of the river just north of where Bedard Boulevard now meets the river road.

The new mill was much more popular and gave good service. A saw mill was added to the grist mill and the lumber was used locally. At this time, vast lumber rafts were being floated down the Ottawa River from Philemon Wright's mills at Hull.

In 1810 when stopping at St. Andrews, Colonel By of canal fame was urged to visit the Lachute Falls with a view to utilizing its water power. He was accompanied to the site by the Rev. R. Bradford but apparently was not impressed by the potentialities of the North River. Otherwise, industry would have developed there much faster.

Schools and Places of Worship

With the growing number of children, some school system had to be devised. Since the families were thinly spread over a large area, a central school was out of the question so a number of schools were developed two or three miles distant from each other. The first schools were held in private houses as far apart as the Falls and the East Settlement, but in 1801, the first log school house was built about half a mile up river from the Falls for some 20-35 scholars. This was located on the west side of Main Street between Foundry and Robert Street (Fig. 5), and the timbers from this building are still doing service in the basement of the Hall belonging to Mr. McArthur. In the next few years, a number of other schools were built, one built in 1810 but later burned down, was the predecessor of the still surviving school house located just east of the Protestant cemetery in the grounds of the house where the Hon. W. Cottingham now resides. Sixty scholars attended this East End school, the first school-master being

J. D. Ely, who was succeeded by Aaron Wood in 1814, (Fig. -5).

The American immigrants were Methodists whilst the later Scottish settlers belonged to the Scottish Presbyterian Church.

The earliest church services were held in barns; later the school houses were used for services. The first preachers were Methodist ministers sent from a central organization in New York called the Troy Conference. One 'preacher by the name of Picket formed a circuit embracing L'Orignal, Hawkesbury, Chatham and Argenteuil and he walked from place to place. In the Lachute area, he held services as early as 1799 in a barn on the north side of the river. He was followed by a succession of itinerant Methodist preachers, first the Rev. Suval, then the Rev. Thomas Madden who came in 1810. The next minister, the Rev. Thaddeus Osgoode, started a Sunday School in 1811. Since these missionary preachers were sent from the States, the war of 1812 cut off the supply and for several years the gap was filled with local lay preachers, chief among whom was John S. Hutchins who often led the congregation in prayer.

The first Church of England minister to come into the district was the Rev. Richard Bradford who lived in Chatham, but came occasionally to conduct services in Lachute around or even before 1811.